

"On Leadership"

Williamson Community Leadership Programme,

Inaugural Williamson Community Leadership Lecture

24 August 1994

001156

WILLIAMSON COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

INAUGURAL WILLIAMSON COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP LECTURE

Queen's Hall, Parliament House, Melbourne

Wednesday 24 August 1994

ON LEADERSHIP

The Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG *

LEADERSHIP - IF ONLY WE COULD BOTTLE IT

We meet here as free people in the most splendid Parliament building of our country. The Queen's Hall was built in 1879. What confidence in the future it exudes. Even in rustic circumstances, the early settlers in this continent had a great vision for the future. They would not be governed for long by rule from London or Sydney. Their first Parliament convened in 1851. In 1856 they began this assertive building. Although many wrongs were doubtless done, as they opened up the continent, we do no good to wish away our history. We should not distort its truth or ignore the many brave achievements and inspiring examples of leadership which occurred on the way.

As we close this century of war and suffering, of dazzling science and of the beginnings of global government, it is worth asking ourselves whether the Australians of the second century have shown the same dedication, commitment and imagination as those of the first. As we sit in this fine Hall, we can conjure in our imagination

President of the Court of Appeal of New South Wales. Personal opinions.

with the images, the spirits and the words of leaders who struggled and fought for the peoples' acclaim, including in this place. Here, the first National Parliament of Australia assembled. Here the foundations of our nation's statutes were laid. Here the dark decisions were made that were to lead to the sacrifices at Gallipoli and on the Somme. Here, the tradition of a constitutional Parliamentary democracy for a continent was first laid down. We are privileged to meet in such a place. It gives perspective to our thoughts and encouragement to our aspirations to go beyond the banal and the ordinary.

It would be banal and ordinary of me to turn these reflections on leadership into a discussion of the events of the week past which surrounded the publication by Mr Bob Hawke of his *Memoirs*. Circling around that book there has been a surfeit of superficial media discussion of "leadership". According to Mr Hawke, the present Prime Minister, Mr Paul Keating was "not ready for the leadership" of his Party and of the nation because (in his view) there were deficiencies of judgment and character.¹ In Mr Hawke's opinion, as reported, he, Bob Hawke, had the qualities of leadership "in spades":

"Leadership [he said] is not just a matter of technical and political competence but requires commitment to a set of values which uphold the worth and interdependence of the whole human family. It requires aggression at times but, always, it demands an ability to put the interests of one's country above all else."²

In a place such as this, reminded in this great Hall of the transience of human power, I plan to avoid adding to the torrent of words of what must be the most prolonged book launch in the history of our country. Of Mr Hawke's competing claims against Mr Keating, I will say not a word. Indeed, I do not really want to speak

¹ As quoted Mark Baker, review in *The Age*, 24 August 1994, 13.

² *Ibid.*

(except occasionally) about political leadership at all. In the Queen's Hall, I remind myself of the convention of party political neutrality which the permanent government (of the Crown, the judges and the civil service) observe whilst the democratic elements of government (in Parliament and the Ministry) constantly compete and change.

I want to speak of features of leadership which I have seen. If we could extract the essence of the phenomenon, and bottle it, it would be a product bigger than *Coca Cola*. It would sell better than Ronald McDonald. What is it that makes some people natural leaders? We have all looked upon individuals in whom we see this light. The ancients described them as having a charisma - a special grace or talent which exuded from them as a favour vouchsafed by God. Now that word is thoroughly debased. Charisma - it is used for all and sundry. Yet in my life, I have met a few people with a light shining from them because of special gifts of foresight and insight: the two qualities working symbiotically upon each other.

It is no use trying to work out how this comes about. Adrienne Clark, Chairman of the CSIRO, told the 1994 Williamson Community Leadership Programme opening of James Macgregor Burns' suggestion that "the most important influences in the shaping of leaders, ... lie almost wholly in their early years."³ Professor Clark told of her grandmother who had wonderful allusions and aphorisms as a guide to life. They included *Madam Doasyouwouldbedoneby* from Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies*.⁴ I can vouch for the impact of didactic fairy tales on my life, as doubtless you can on yours. In my case, the terrifying stories of the brothers Grimm warned me against aspiring beyond my deserts. Like Icarus, I would then fall to earth as the sun melted the wax attaching the feathers by which I would aspire to fly.

³ A Clark, opening of the 1994 programme of the Williamson Community Leadership Programme April 1994 in *Williamson Community Leadership Newsletter*, April 1994, 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

Nor is there much use analysing the psychology or physiology⁵ of leadership. Books on these subjects are now written.⁶ But because psychologists and psychiatrists tend to get the abnormal case, such books tend to concentrate on the dysfunctional behaviour of leaders - ranging from narcissism and hubris (of which we have seen more than our fair share in recent days) through to emotional denial and "impostering". What is it in a politician, a business leader, a scientist or a sporting champion that puts some people clearly ahead of the ruck? Once there, it is true, office and opportunity adorn the aspirant. With the responsibility of command, and the opportunities to display its exercise, the leader gains attention. If he or she has it, the very position will reinforce, for a time at least, the respect of others and their willingness to follow. Of course this is not always so. I read recently of one general whose troops followed him, but only out of a sense of idle curiosity.

So far (in the manner of a lawyer) I have said a lot about what I am not going to speak about. The time has now come to approach the positive and the concrete.

It goes without saying that leaders must have some conception of where they are going. I realise that some thinkers on the subject have suggested that leaders only take the mass of people where they are going anyway.⁷ But I cannot accept this. However dimly formed the goal may be, a leader - of a nation, a business, a court, a sporting team or whatever - must at least have some idea of the general direction ahead. What then are the features of human personality that turn one individual, who began as a helpless baby, into a man or woman whom others would follow? Each of us could devise our list of qualities. I have five main ones that I wish to identify. You will doubtless compare them to your own experience.

⁵ Manfred de Vries, *Leaders, Fools and Imposters: Essays on the Psychology of Leadership*, San Francisco, 1993 reviewed in *Newsletter* above n3, 9.

⁶ N McAdam, "In Search of the Sensitive New Age Leader - Brain Dominance and Leadership Style", in *Management*, November, 1993, 5.

⁷ B Evans, *The Spoor of Spooks and Other Nonsense*, 1994.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF OTHERS

First, it is often said that the best leaders are those who serve. The Chinese philosopher Lao Tsu in the sixth century said that a leader is greatest when people barely know that he exists. The leader's work done, the aim fulfilled, the followers will say "we did it ourselves".⁸

A bishop told me at dinner last week that Jesus was an especially striking example of the leader-servant. We, who were brought up in the Christian tradition, have the vivid image of Him washing the disciples' feet. Many great religious leaders and philosophers were extremely humble, self-effacing and respectful of the integrity of others. By their example and their works they could get into the minds and hearts of people around them. They could inspire a devotion and a willingness to follow. The Dalai Lama, whom I have met twice, undoubtedly falls in this class. His inner calm demands one's respectful attention.

I saw two further examples of this great quality in a recent visit to Cambodia. The proponents were not famous. You will have heard of neither of them. Yet each is an Australian of great personal character, with inspiring qualities of leadership.

The first is Warrant Officer Craig ("Shorty") Coleman of the Royal Australian Engineers. He was my escort officer when I went to Battambang in Northern Cambodia in my capacity of Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Human Rights. "Shorty" took me along the highway which leads to Pailin - the unreachable headquarters of the Khmer Rouge. He explained, with the support of other brave foreigners and Cambodians, the techniques of de-mining in which he was engaged. He talked with gentleness to the amputees, seen everywhere in that part of a long-suffering country. He directed and supervised 150 Cambodians, whom he and other soldiers had trained in the painstaking work of de-mining. The land is rich. But the harvest of mines is perilous. The plastic detonators contain minuscule quantities of metal. They are extremely hard to find - except by walking on

⁸

Cited in N McAdam above n6, 5.

them. The slightest lapse of concentration may mean death or grievous injury. I saw one Cambodian who had been set at gun point by cruel gaolers on the task of de-mining. He had lost an eye, two arms and the power of one leg. It was not a pretty sight. De-mining is the work that Warrant Officer Coleman is devoted to performing. He is one of several Australians engaged in this enterprise. His leadership of the Cambodian personnel whom he has helped to train was an inspiration to me. Their devotion to his instruction and example was an eye-opener. Yet most Australians have never heard of him. He is an unsung hero of our defence forces.

Whilst in Battambang I visited a Buddhist Temple. There in the ashram was a wonderful Australian nun of the St Joseph's order, Sister Joan. She had gathered together a group of brave men and women - all but two of them Cambodians - who are defending and asserting the human rights of their fellow Cambodians. If you know the least thing about Cambodian history, you would know what courage that requires. By gentle incitement, by good humour and patience this fine Australian woman, sitting with me on the floor with her pupils, is giving a daily example to people whose lives have been scarred by war, revolution, violence and the constant peril of land mines. "Do you teach them religion?", I asked. "Goodness, no", she replied - as if shocked by my question. Her life is all the religion and example of her beliefs that she will leave behind in the memory of her pupils. She is their leader and their encouragement. She is teaching of the needs of women to stand up for their rights and of villagers to give voice against petty tyrants and oppression. I am not myself a Catholic. But the life of Sister Joan brings the greatest credit on her Church and on our country. She leads by selfless involvement with others. So here is the first quality - the best leaders lead by involving others.

COURAGE TO DO UNPOPULAR THINGS

It is often said that human rights matter most when they are demanded by unpopular minorities and stigmatised groups. A past Chief Justice of Australia, Sir John Latham, put it well in a decision in which he said that the big religions of

Australia - Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism, etc - could generally look after themselves in the matter of freedom of religion. Where that freedom matters most (or only really matters at all as a practical issue) is where an unpopular minority religion demands it. Perhaps the Mormons with their countless home visits, the mysterious Plymouth Brethren, the discreet Jehovah's Witnesses or The Family.

So it is with many leaders. They emerge from the ruck because they show courage. They see before others injustice which, when revealed, demands redress. Their fore-vision is the essence of their leadership.

Mahatma Gandhi, the advocate of non-violent non-cooperation in India, was hauled before a British judge in Ahmadabad in 1922 for seditious libel. He immediately pleaded guilty. His speech to the court asserted that he had rendered a service not only to India but also to England by showing that non-cooperation was the way to bring to an end the unnatural state in which the two countries were living. He cheerfully invited the highest penalty that could be inflicted upon him; for his crime was deliberate. But he asserted his moral innocence.⁹ Martin Luther King was a leader of like moral strength.

The only man of this quality whom I have met is Nelson Mandela. Now there is a political leader of rare quality. Although imprisoned for nearly thirty years, he emerged unscathed in psyche and in moral power. His steadfast belief in the correctness of his cause was his strength through the long years of imprisonment when many others fell away. That strength became an inspiration to his followers - and a mighty challenge to his captors and his oppressors.

I met Nelson Mandela in 1993 when I went to South Africa for the International Labor Organisation. This was the first United Nations mission to that country since its banishment for apartheid in the 1960s. Nelson Mandela was not yet in power. But he was already urging the building of a truly multi-racial and tolerant

⁹ M Ghandi, "Non-Violence is the First Article of my Faith" in B MacArthur (ed.), *The Penguin Book of 20th Century Speeches*, Penguin, 1992, 82, 87.

society post apartheid. Here indeed was a case of true charisma. It shone luminously from his person. He invited me to the inauguration which followed his election as President earlier this year. Ironical it was to see the commanders of the armed forces saluting him - their medals, won in battle against his army, gleaming in the sunlight. Typical of the man was his invitation to the ceremony of a number of his white prison officers on Robben Island. Over the long years and many conversations, they had become his devoted followers.

We in Australia have not been quite so sorely tested. But we too have had fine leaders who have helped to show us wrongs and to point us in the direction of righting them:

- Moira Rayner, who, as Equality Opportunity Commissioner was a commanding advocate for redressing the wrongs and injustices, including those suffered by women and by children: Elizabeth Evatt, Fay Marles, Quentin Bryce, Phillis Frost, Beryl Beaurepaire;
- Charles Perkins, Lois O'Donohue, Patrick Dodson and many others who, over the long haul, have been brave advocates towards a new compact with Australia's indigenous Aboriginal people;
- Nick Toonen and Rodney Croome. They braved the stigma of intolerant co-citizens in Tasmania to stand up for their identity, their right to privacy and their fundamental rights to be themselves. When deaf ears greeted their appeal in their own country, they took their cause to the United Nations in Geneva. Not so easy to stand up and be gay in Tasmania. They provided the key that may, in due course of time, remove unjust belittlement and stigma against homosexual and bisexual men in Tasmania and in many places far from there;
- I think too of the many brave men and women who have been mobilized in the struggle against AIDS in our country. Of Dr Neal Blewett who, as Federal Minister for Health, gave rare political leadership to combating the spread of the virus with its fateful course. With Peter Baume and leading politicians of all

persuasions, Neal Blewett put together an alliance for life. For once our politicians showed admirable leadership. They took very brave decisions. Many still remain to be taken. But at least we were honest and confronted both the virus and the second epidemic of discrimination. It is an important story. There have been many noble actors in it. W.H. Auden expressed the fears long before AIDS appeared:

*"O where are you going?' said reader to rider
'That valley is fatal when furnaces burn,
Yonder's the midden whose odours will madden,
That gap is the grave where the tall return.'*

*'O what was that bird,' said horror to hearer,
'Did you see that shape in the twisted trees?
Behind you swiftly the figure comes softly,
The spot on your skin is a shocking disease.'"¹⁰*

- In Cambodia last month I saw another example of leadership requiring courage to do the unpopular but right things. Squeezed between Thailand and Vietnam, the Khmers have a long history of fear of their neighbours. The Khmer Rouge play on ethnic hatred in a most shameful fashion - mainly directed at the ethnic Vietnamese. During the elections, a group of 5000 ethnic Vietnamese were escorted by the United Nations, under the blue flag, to sanctuary at Chrey Thom near the Vietnamese border. They are fishing people. They have lived for 18 months on their little boats. Their food is handouts. Their children suffer abscesses from unboiled water, illness and malnutrition. They are receiving no education. Most of them are third generation residents of Cambodia. They only ask to return to their villages. But resistance is strong. I went to visit them at Chrey Thom. I accompanied the doctor on his rounds. And with me, through it all, were some fine Khmer human rights activists. Mrs Khek Galibru stands out in

¹⁰ W H Auden. *O Where are you Going?*

my memory. She sat with me as I spoke to these refugees. She spoke in her own language, and in English and French, to the local and international media. She appealed for compassion and understanding. She pointed to the suffering of the children. She gave leadership to her fellow Khmer citizens. In Northern Ireland, and in Palestine, in Rwanda, and in El Salvador, and on the little boats at Chrey Thom we need leaders of this character. Leadership is not just following the transitory opinion polls and popular opinion as some people of power think. It is not simply looking at corporate balance sheets. It involves a commitment to improving the lot of fellow human beings, especially those who are suffering. It involves taking some risks.

THE CAPACITY TO COMMUNICATE AND CONCEPTUALISE

The third capacity I would mention is the leader's ability to communicate and conceptualise ideas and to carry other people by the power of the ideas. In order to get people to follow, it is usually necessary to provide a reason. Napoleon, in his *Maxims*, asserted that "a leader is a dealer in hope". The leader must know. He must know that he knows. And he must be able to make it abundantly clear to those about him that he knows.¹¹ It is no good having bright ideas if you cannot convey them to others; and inspire them to accept your ideas - preferably thinking of them as their own.

Of course, some people are born with greater gifts of oral or written communication than others. They have an ability to speak or write in word pictures. To express their ideas simply. To do it with confidence and with power. To be subtle and to sense opportunities and the way to mould communication to the immediate environment. This cannot be wholly learned. I think it is in part genetic. It has something to do with the signal mechanisms of the brain. But would-be leaders can be trained in some of the tricks of modern communication. Even Mrs Thatcher took

¹¹ C Randall, *Making Good in Management*.

speech training. King George VI overcame his stutter by speaking to a metronome. Fear and nerves in public speaking tend to melt away with the years - and with confidence that disastrous performances will generally be forgotten in the afterglow of the post oratorical wine or in the morning.

Technology has altered leadership in the matter of communication. The modern media demand skills different from those of leaders of earlier times. Churchill, and Menzies (and to some extent Whitlam) were, or are, masters of the pause. But the leader today must be disciplined into the 30 second "grab" for six o'clock television. Now that really demands a concentrated ability to send a verbal data signal in vivid prose but with stern economy. It is quite a skill - but it may not always coincide with capacity for sustained thought and attention to detail.

It is not only by verbal messages that people lead. Kieren Perkins, Samantha Riley, Cathy Freeman and many other fine leaders, at the Commonwealth Games, send golden signals of inspiration to thousands of young Australian schoolchildren who aspire to athletic excellence. In this sense, they are leaders. Often it is the poet, the film maker, the book writer, entrepreneur, speech writer or the opera singer who puts large ideas into the mind of a nation. Those ideas burrow away until finally they come to fruition in resolute action. Twenty years ago, long before the *Mabo* decision, Kath Walker, Oogeroo of the Nunuccal Tribe, wrote down the idea of Aboriginal equality and white reconciliation based on justice:

*"Look up my people
The dawn is breaking
The world is waking
To a new bright day
When none defame us
No restriction tame us
Nor colour shame us
Nor sneer dismay.*

*Now brood no more
On the years behind you
The hope assigned you*

*Shall the past replace
When a juster justice
Grown wise and stronger
Points the bone longer
At a darker race."*

Historians and poets are much disparaged in our country as "eggheads" and intellectuals. Yet the power of their writing can help shape the imagination and the ideals of their generation.

ACCEPTANCE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

A fourth feature of leadership is the willingness to accept responsibility and accountability to others. This is where the going of leadership gets harder. The undoing of many leaders arrives when they come to be dazzled by their own charisma and eloquence. Then they become inflexible: unwilling or slow to change.

In Cambodia I have seen many leaders at work - striving to build a civil society in the place of despair. The judges at Battambang and Sihanoukville who work long hours for small financial reward to get through daunting court lists. The prosecutor who had to escape through a window of a courthouse to avoid a military attack in retaliation for the simple performance of his duty. And who was back in his office the next day. The prison commander who resolved to allow human rights groups to speak to prisoners about their collective and individual rights - a thought unthinkable even a year ago. The Minister for Education, a graduate of Monash University, who replaced corruption and nepotism in the matriculation exam by a national system to ensure the application of objective standards. The myriad human rights workers who are the children of the UNTAC period which two Australians - Senator Gareth Evans and Lieutenant General John Sanderson - played a crucial part to secure. It is the nature of media today that we hear a lot of a small group of bandits and their terrible attack on a train containing three foreigners. The news of the quiet work of determined people who are true leaders is lost in the clamour of the sensational. Their acts of leadership

are often uncelebrated - and overlooked. Let us pause to reflect on them tonight - not bandits but leaders.

KNOWING WHEN TO GO

The fifth quality is knowing when to go. It is here that democracy - which often helps the process along - has it all over autocracy and dictatorship. Menzies alone of our post-war Prime Ministers departed of his own volition from The Lodge. A good leader, in management, politics, the judiciary or anything else will prepare for the unthinkable day when someone else will take over the reins. Each of us should see our lives in stages. Remaining too long at one stage, may not be best for those we aspire to lead. But it may also be bad for ourselves for there are always new worlds to conquer.

BUT WHERE ARE YOU LEADING?

For all this talk of leadership, we should not allow any leader unbridled rein. As free people, we should retain our own sense of judgment and discernment and scepticism. We should be reminded of the values that transcend even the importance of leadership. Leadership, as such, is only as good as the direction in which we will be taken.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Second World War has presented us with numerous opportunities to study the fanatical leadership of Hitler and Stalin. On their consciences rested the fates of millions of ordinary humans like you and me. These leaders with their crazed ideas have been replaced by a world of pettier tyrants, having an equal indifference to moral scruple and fundamental human rights. We can all recognise them when we see them. They exist in most nations. With their puffed up vanity, they exist in every walk of life.

It is important to remember this in any talk of leadership. It demonstrates that leadership, as such, is not the ideal after all. There have been gifted leaders of the most horrible wickedness. A list of the top ten business leaders who came to mind of

a survey of young Australians a few years back, now looks like a catalogue of discredited fallen heroes. Half of the list are bankrupt, in prison or charged before the courts.¹² This is the kind of leadership Australia and its business enterprises can do without. It is proof that gifts of leadership, alone, are not enough.

There must be that extra dimension: a commitment to improving (in the words of the American founding fathers) life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness of ordinary people. My life in various public posts over twenty years has convinced me that such qualities of leadership exist in the world - and in Australia - in abundance. Leaders of this kind deserve our unstinting praise. They give us their example. We may not reach their standards. But each of us, in our lives, can aspire to be leaders for a better world in the coming millennium. Let Oogeroo -- our fellow Australian - a poet - have the last word:

*"So long we waited
Bound and frustrated,
Till hate be hated
And caste deposed;
Now light shall guide us,
No goal denied us,
And all doors open
That long were closed.*

*See plain the promise,
Dark freedom-lover!
Night's nearly over,
And though long the climb,
New rights will greet us,
New mateship meet us,
And joy complete us
In our new Dream Time.*

*To our fathers' fathers
The pain, the sorrow'
To our children's children
The glad tomorrow."¹³*

¹² Amdahl Executive Institute, *Attitudes of Australian Youth Leadership*, November 1993, 25.

¹³ Kath Walker (Oogeroo of the Nunuccal): *Song of Hope* in *Collected Poems*.

On leadership

By The Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG

Leadership - if only we could bottle it

It goes without saying that leaders must have some conception of where they are going. I realise that some thinkers on the subject have suggested that leaders only take the mass of people where they are going anyway.¹ But I cannot accept this. However dimly formed the goal may be, a leader - of a nation, a business, a court, a sporting team or whatever - must at least have some idea of the general direction ahead. What then are the features of human personality that turn one individual, who began as a helpless baby, into a man or woman whom others would follow? Each of us could devise our list of qualities. I have five main ones that I wish to identify.

The involvement of others

First, it is often said that the best leaders are those who serve. The Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu in the sixth century said that a leader is greatest when people barely know that he exists. The leader's work done, that aim fulfilled, the followers will say "we did it ourselves".²

A bishop told me at dinner last week that Jesus was an especially striking example of the leader-servant. We, who were brought up on the Christian tradition, have the vivid image of Him washing the disciples' feet. Many great religious leaders and philosophers were extremely humble, self-effacing and respectful of the integrity of others. By their example and their works they could get into the minds and hearts of people around them. They could inspire a devotion and a willingness to follow. The Dalai Lama, whom I have met twice, undoubtedly falls in this class. His inner calm demands one's respectful attention.

Courage to do unpopular things

It is often said that human rights matter most when they are demanded by unpopular minorities and stigmatised groups. A past Chief Justice of Australia, Sir John Latham, put it well in a decision in which he said that the big religions of Australia - Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism, etc - could generally look after themselves in the matter of freedom of religion. Where that freedom matters most (or only really matters at all as a practical issue) is where an unpopular minority religion demands it. Perhaps the Mormons with their countless home visits, the mysterious Plymouth Brethren, the discreet Jehovah's Witnesses or The Family.

So it is with many leaders. They emerge from the ruck because they show courage. They see before others injustice which, when revealed, demands redress. Their fore-
vision is the essence of their leadership.

Mahatma Gandhi, the advocate of non-violent non-cooperation in India, was hauled before a British judge in Ahmadabad in 1922 for seditious libel. He immediately pleaded guilty. His speech to the court asserted that he had rendered a service not only to India but also to England by showing that non-cooperation was the way to bring to an end the unnatural state in which the two countries were living. He cheerfully invited the highest penalty that could be inflicted upon him; for his crime was deliberate. But he asserted his moral innocence.³ Martin Luther King was a leader of like moral strength.

The only man of this quality whom I have met is Nelson Mandela. Now there is a political leader of rare quality. Although imprisoned for nearly thirty years, he emerged unscathed in psyche and in moral power. His steadfast belief in the correctness of his cause was his strength through the long years in imprisonment when many others fell away. That strength became an inspiration to his followers - and a mighty challenge to his captors and his oppressors.

Leadership is not just following the transitory opinion polls and popular opinion as some people of power think. It is not simply looking at corporate balance sheets. It involves a commitment to improving the lot of fellow human beings, especially those who are suffering. It involves taking some risks.

The capacity to communicate and conceptualise

The third capacity I would mention is the leader's ability to communicate and conceptualise ideas and to carry other people by the power of the ideas. In order to get people to follow, it is usually necessary to provide a reason. Napoleon, in his *Maxims*, asserted that "a leader is a dealer in hope". The leader must know. He must know that he knows.⁴ And he must be able to make it abundantly clear to those about him that he knows. It is no good having bright ideas if you cannot convey them to others; and inspire them to accept your ideas - preferably thinking of them as their own.

Of course, some people are born with greater gifts of oral or written communication than others. They have an ability to speak or write in word pictures. To express their ideas simply. To do it with confidence and with power. To be subtle and to sense opportunities and the way to mould communication to the immediate environment. This cannot be wholly learned. I think it is in part genetic. It has something to do with the signal mechanisms of the brain. But would-be leaders can be trained in some of the tricks of modern communication. Even Mrs Thatcher took speech training. King George VI overcame his stutter by speaking to a metronome. Fear and nerves in public speaking tend to melt away with the years - and with confidence that disastrous performances will generally be forgotten in the afterglow of the post oratorical wine or in the morning.

Acceptance of responsibility and accountability

A fourth feature of leadership is the willingness to accept responsibility and accountability to others. This is where the going of leadership gets harder. The undoing of many leaders arrives when they come to be dazzled by their own charisma and eloquence. Then they become inflexible: unwilling or slow to change.

In Cambodia I have seen many leaders at work - striving to build a civil society in the place of despair. The judges at Battambang and Sihanoukville who work long hours for small financial reward to get through daunting court lists. The prosecutor who had to escape through a window of a courthouse to avoid a military attack in retaliation for the simple performance of his duty. And who was back in his office the next day. The prison commander who resolved to allow human rights groups to speak to prisoners about their collective and individual rights - a thought unthinkable even a year ago. The Minister for Education, a graduate of Monash University, who replaced corruption and nepotism in the matriculation exam by a national system to ensure the application of objective standards. The myriad human rights workers who are the children of the UNTAC period which two Australians - Senator Gareth Evans and Lieutenant General John Sanderson - played a crucial part to secure. It is the nature of media today that we hear a lot of a small group of bandits and their terrible attack on a train containing three foreigners. The news of the quiet work of determined people who are true leaders is lost in the clamour of the sensational. Their acts of leadership are often uncelebrated - and overlooked.

Knowing when to go

The fifth quality is knowing when to go. It is here that democracy - which often helps the process along - has it all over autocracy and dictatorship. Menzies alone of our post-war Prime Ministers departed of his own volition from The Lodge. A good leader, in management, politics, the judiciary or anything else will prepare for the unthinkable day when someone else will take over the reins. Each of us should see our lives in stages. Remaining too long at one stage, may not be best for those we aspire to lead. But it may also be bad for ourselves for there are always new worlds to conquer.

But where are you leading?

For all this talk of leadership, we should not allow any leader unbridled rein. As free people, we should retain our own sense of judgment and discernment and scepticism. We should be reminded of the values that transcend even the importance of leadership. Leadership, as such, is only as good as the direction in which we will be taken.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Second World War has presented us with numerous opportunities to study the fanatical leadership of Hitler and Stalin. On their consciences rested the fates of millions of ordinary humans like you and me. These leaders with their crazed ideas have been replaced by a world of pettier tyrants, having

an equal indifference to moral scruple and fundamental human rights. We can all recognise them when we see them. They exist in most nations. With their puffed up vanity, they exist in every walk of life.

It is important to remember this in any talk of leadership. It demonstrates that leadership, as such, is not the ideal after all. There have been gifted leaders of the most horrible wickedness. A list of the top ten business leaders who came to mind of a survey of young Australians a few years back, now looks like a catalogue of discredited fallen heroes. Half of the list are bankrupt, in prison or charged before the courts.¹ This is the kind of leadership Australia and its business enterprises can do without. It is proof that gifts of leadership, alone, are not enough.

There must be that extra dimension: a commitment to improving (in the words of the American founding fathers) life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness of ordinary people. My life in various public posts over twenty years has convinced me that such qualities of leadership exist in the world - and in Australia - in abundance. Leaders of this kind deserve our unstinting praise. They give us their example. We may not reach their standards. But each of us, in our lives, can aspire to be leaders for a better world in the coming millennium.

References

1. B Evans, *The Spoor of Spooks and Other Nonsense*, 1994.
2. Cited in N McAdam, "In Search of the Sensitive New Age Leader - Brain Dominance and Leadership Style", in *Management*, November, 1993, 5.
3. M Gandhi, "Non-Violence is the First Article of my Faith" in B MacArthur (ed.), *The Penguin Book of 20th Century Speeches*, Penguin, 1992, 82, 87.
4. C Randall, *Making Good in Management*.
5. Amdahl Executive Institute, *Attitudes of Australian Youth Leadership*, November 1993, 25.

The Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG is President of the Court of Appeal of New South Wales. The personal opinions expressed in this piece are drawn from an edited version of the Inaugural Williamson Community Leadership Lecture delivered in Queen's Hall, Parliament House, Melbourne on Wednesday 24 August, 1994.